

We have the united testimony of ancient historians and poets to the effect, that the city rapidly increased until it arrived at so great an extent, and to such a degree of splendour, that Thucydides (long before it reached its summit of prosperity under Dionysius) acknowledged it to be equal in size to Athens; and Cicero mentions it, in one of his orations, as the largest and most magnificent city in Greece.*

The city was under different governments until freed from the tyranny of Thrasylbulus, 446 a.c.; and sixty-one years afterwards it was usurped by the Dionysii, who were expelled by Timoleon 343 a.c. The celebrated part it took in the wars with Carthage, its memorable conflicts with the Athenians, and its sad and mighty fall, after enduring a three years' siege by the Roman conqueror, Marcellus, are events so well known to every scholar, as to require no further allusion to on my part at this meeting.

In after years, the Saracens completed the ruin the Romans commenced; and a.d. 827 Syracuse resigned to her rival, Palermo, the proud title of Capital of Sicily. From that time the city has dwindled into comparative insignificance. Her population at the present time does not exceed 12,000; and that commerce which once filled its glorious harbours with the ships of Rhodes, Alexandria, and Carthage, is now confined to a few speronaras engaged in a miserable coasting trade.

Syracuse is said to have derived its name originally from the neighbouring Marsh Syraco (now called *Il Pantano*), and situate on the right bank of the Anapus; it was afterwards called *Tetrapolis*, a city formed of four distinct quarters, and these were named *Ortygia*, *Acradina*, *Aychia*, and *Neapolis*.

According to Strabo, the circuit of the ancient walls was 80 stadia, or 22½ miles, including the suburb of Epipolæ, which was to the westward of Neapolis, and commanded the whole city. At the extremity of Epipolæ was an almost impregnable fortress, called Euryale, mentioned by Livy, and other historians.

The great port of Syracuse—one of the finest in the Mediterranean—is about five miles in circumference. As you enter from the ocean, to the left hand is the rock Plemmyrium, distant from the opposite shore of Ortygia about half a mile. It was across this entrance to the port that the Syracusans, by advice of Hierocrates, threw a strong chain, and thus blockaded the Athenian fleet.

In modern times, the great port of Syracuse has its name connected with a glorious event; for it was here that Nelson re-visited his fleet previous to the battle of the Nile. The lesser port is on the other side of the island Ortygia; it was called *Portus Marmoreus*, according to some authorities, from the bottom having originally been paved with marble; but perhaps with more probability from the costly buildings which lined its shores.

I will now endeavour briefly to describe the four quarters of the city, commencing with the most ancient one. Ortygia was formerly considered the most important part, in consequence of its commanding the entrance to both the ports. The tyrants established their residences in this division, and added, from time to time, to the fortifications. The Romans also, when masters of Syracuse, regarded the situation of Ortygia in the same important light, and prohibited any native citizen from residing in that portion of the city.

The Temple of Minerva was the most sacred and important building in Ortygia: it now forms the cathedral, or duomo, to the modern city, to which purpose it was converted during the 12th century, when the Goddess of Wisdom was obliged to resign her shrine to "Our Lady of the Columns;" for such was the change in the dedication of this edifice.

The temple was of the Doric order, peripteral and hexastyle, with fourteen columns on the sides. The lower diameter is about six feet seven inches, and the height twenty-eight feet ten inches. The character of the order resembles the Agrigentine examples.† Twenty-one columns of the Peristyles, with portions of the entablature, are still standing; but, unfortunately, they are built up in the outer walls of the duomo. The two columns of the Posticum

also remain. The columns, unfortunately, have been disfigured with modern plaster and additional mouldings; and it is much to be regretted that these, by some oversight, have found their way into an important work on Magna Græcia, and are there shown as part of the ancient work. It was only after much entreaty and persuasion, and offering ample security, in case of injury, that the church authorities (who, unfortunately, in Sicily, are not so devoted to archaeological pursuits as the clergy in this country) gave us permission to raise a scaffold, and clear away these unseemly encumbrances.

Cicero has given us an excellent description of the gorgeous magnificence of this temple, which, spared by the piety of Marcellus, was stripped of every thing but the roof and walls by the rapacious Verres. "Its doors," says the Roman orator, "were the theme of universal eulogy, exhibiting the labours of Hercules, curiously wrought in ivory, the angles of each separate panel being adorned with golden bosses of exquisite workmanship, while a Medusa's head, formed of the same rich material, shone above the portal, surrounded with its bristling snakes." We learn also from Athenæus, that upon the exterior summit of the roof was elevated an enormous shield, consecrated to Minerva, and visible to a great distance by the reflection of the solar rays. A custom prevailed among the Syracusan sailors, to secure a safer return from their voyage, of carrying from an altar near the Temple of Juno some ashes in a chalice, which, with flowers, honey, frankincense, and other aromatics, they cast into the sea as soon as they were about to lose sight of this shield. The interior of the walls of this temple were covered with paintings, amongst which was an equestrian combat of King Agathocles, one of the most esteemed works of Syracusan art: this, with twenty-seven other admirable pictures, did the unscrupulous Verres carry away. According to tradition, Archimedes drew an equinoctial line in this temple, and Mirabella says that in 1582 the commissioners appointed by Pope Gregory for the correction of the calendar came to Syracuse for the purpose of examining it. This building has suffered much from earthquakes, but I strongly suspect the hand of man has been the great destroyer: the modern façade of the Borromini school forms a strange mixture with the rigid Doric of the ancient peristyle.

Of the Temple of Diana, two Doric columns with a small portion of entablature alone remain. To judge of the effect of them is no very easy matter, for the columns are unfortunately encased by the walls of a modern dwelling, and the capitals are absolutely inclosed in a wretched closet. Notwithstanding this sad modern degradation of the great Diana's fane, these scanty remains possess considerable degree of interest, as belonging to the most ancient temple of Ortygia; and it is a curious circumstance, that the style of the columns, with the bold swelling capital, strongly resembles the order at Corinth, the mother city. The *Selinus* and *Pæstum* examples have also a great resemblance to it. The intercolumniation must have been very small, there being only 1 foot 6½ inches between the abaci of the two capitals. I am happy to state, that since my visit to Syracuse, the Duke of Serradifalco (a nobleman so well known to us all for his successful architectural researches in his native country, and for his contributions to the library of the Institute), has discovered the lower portions of these columns. Near this temple stood the celebrated Baths of Daphne, so named from a laurel grove sacred to Diana; the spot is now called *Bagnara*, and many remains have been discovered near it.

The celebrated fountain of Arethusa next claims our attention. This classic spot, sacred to the nymph to whom divine honours were offered, and upon whose shrine even Hercules sacrificed, still pours forth its abundant supply of fresh water as of old, but alas how different its present state! It is now the public washing place of the town; and when I saw it, a number of Hungarian soldiers were lounging around it, enjoying their merriments, quite unconscious of the fame of the spot, or of the gibes and wit that the Syracusan laundresses were indulging in at their expense.

According to Diodorus, the celebrated building, the palace of sixty couches, which in magnitude and splendour was so superior to the

temples, that the Gods, from jealousy, are said to have destroyed it by thunder, was situate in Ortygia. This, together with the palace and gardens of Dionysius, the citadel surrendered by Dionysius to Timoleon, the Palace of Hiero, afterwards the residence of the Roman prætor and præconsuls, and the workshops of the infamous Verres, have all disappeared, and their sites are now occupied with modern fortifications, and narrow streets of miserable dwellings.

I now proceed to the adjoining quarter of the city, called Acradina, described by Cicero "as the second city, containing a spacious forum, a beautiful portico, and an ornamental prytæum, or public hall, from which Verres stole the inimitable statue of Sappho, the great work of Silanion." Of these buildings there are now no existing remains. It is, however, probable that the Church of San Giovanni occupies the site of an ancient temple; and Mr. Hughes, in his admirable and elaborate description of the city, supposes it to have been the Temple of Jupiter, in which Hiero suspended the Gallic and Illyrian spoils presented by him to the Roman senate; and from a passage in which Cicero upbraids Verres for allowing a piratical corsair to sail into the port, and penetrate up to the very forum, we may infer that the forum was placed near the Isthmus.

In this quarter of Acradina are several of those Latomæ, or stone quarries, which are so numerous in Syracuse. The most remarkable one is perhaps the one attached to the Capuchin convent, and now converted into a garden, forming one of the most beautiful and retired spots that possibly could be selected for devotional study.

There are also various subterraneous remains in this quarter, with vaults constructed of earthen pots, and the ruins of a bath excavated by Landolina, in 1804, in which was found the beautiful Torso of Venus, now forming the most valuable specimen of ancient sculpture to be found in the museum of the modern city.

The celebrated catacombs are in the quarter Acradina, and whether they are the works of the Syracusans previous to the Roman conquest by Marcellus, or subsequent to that period, is still a matter of conjecture. Mr. Hughes is inclined to attribute them to the Romans. At all events they are prodigious works. Denon describes them as a perfect subterranean city. The principal street or avenue in the catacombs is about eighteen feet wide and ten high, with numerous recesses and chambers on either side, with separate receptacles for the bodies, in one of which I counted no less than fifteen divisions. Swinburn relates that he saw a gold coin of the time of Ictas just taken out of the jaws of a body found in a tomb here: this must have been the *Naulon*, or Charon's fare.

Along the main street, at intervening distances, are transverse streets, forming at their intersections square and circular apartments, which are generally vaulted, and in some of them are conical apertures for light and air. Around these chambers are numerous recesses symmetrically formed. In some parts the walls are covered with fine stucco, and there are the remains of painting, with monograms and symbolical devices, the works probably of the early Christians. An old Capuchin monk acted as our cicerone in going through the catacombs, and the effect of his slow and solemn step, and the glare of the torches through this city of the dead, will not be readily effaced from my memory.

Of the walls of Acradina there are still remaining considerable vestiges, and the rock itself is in some places furrowed into battlements.

Nnt far from a gap in the rock, called *Scala Græca*, where the quarter of Acradina terminated, and that of Tycha commenced, may be traced one of the principal gates of ancient Syracuse, and which, like some of the other gateways, was admirably contrived for defence, the assailants being forced to expose their right side, which was unprotected by the shield, to a great length of wall, and the missiles of its defenders.

From *Scala Græca* a broad road traversed the city to the point Ortygia, lined on each side by strong walls and towers. Fazello states, that a little beyond it, in the quarter of Tycha, stood the town called *Galeagra*, where

* *Urben Syracusan maximam esse Græcorum urbium pulcherrimamque omnium sæpe audisti.*—Cic., *Orat.* 2, in *Ver.* lib. ix.

† I have shown the capitals half the real size. The entablature may be considered as a good example of the favourite Becco di Cretta, or Owl's Beak moulding of the ancients.